

Listing of Claims:

1. (Original) An interactive medication cassette for use with a medication dispensing machine that dispenses medication, the dispensing machine having an associated computer processor and a sensing mechanism for obtaining and transmitting information to and from the associated computer processor, said interactive medication cassette comprising:

a housing adapted to hold an actual quantity of the medication, said housing being adapted to allow removal of the medication, and said housing being removably secured to the dispensing machine;

a machine readable and writable information strip affixed to said cassette, said information strip containing actual quantity information corresponding to said actual quantity of the medication held by said cassette, and said information strip being in communication with the sensing mechanism to transmit said actual quantity information to the associated computer processor; and,

wherein the dispensing machine alters said actual quantity of the medication in said cassette when dispensing an amount of the medication, and the computer processor alters said information strip to indicate that said actual quantity of the medication in said cassette was altered.

2. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 1, and wherein the dispensing machine is adapted to dispense the medication from said cassette, and the computer processor alters said information strip to indicate that said actual quantity of the medication in said cassette has been decreased.

3. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 1, and wherein the dispensing machine is adapted to dispense the medication to said cassette, and the computer processor alters said information strip to indicate that said actual quantity of the medication in said cassette has been increased.

4. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 2, and wherein the medication held by said cassette is a particular type of medication and said information strip contains medication type information, and wherein the dispensing machine includes an associated memory device containing prescription information, said prescription information including patient information identifying a specific patient and corresponding prescribed medication type information for that specific patient, and the computer processor is adapted to compare said medication type information of said information strip to said prescribed medication type information prior to dispensing medication to verify that said medication type information matches said prescribed medication type information.
5. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 4, and wherein the computer processor alters said information strip to include said patient information identifying a patient for whom the medication was dispensed.
6. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 5, and wherein the computer processor alters said information strip to include physician information identifying a physician that prescribed the medication.
7. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 1, and wherein the dispensing machine includes a data entry mechanism in communication with the associated computer processor, and wherein a healthcare worker dispensing medication from the dispensing machine enters healthcare worker information identifying that healthcare worker via said data entry mechanism, and wherein the computer processor alters said information strip to include said healthcare worker information.
8. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 3, and wherein the medication is dispensed to said cassette from a bulk medication container, said bulk medication container having a machine readable label containing bulk medication information, and the computer processor alters said information strip of said cassette to include said bulk medication information.

9. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 8, and wherein said bulk medication information includes medication type information.

10. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 9, and wherein said bulk medication information includes pharmaceutical manufacturer information.

11. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 8, and wherein a singulator is used to separate one dose of the medication from other doses of the medication when dispensing the medication from said bulk container.

12. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 8, and wherein said bulk medication container contains an actual bulk quantity of the medication, said machine readable label includes a machine readable and writable information strip, and said medication information in said information strip of said bulk container includes actual bulk quantity information corresponding to said actual bulk quantity of the medication, and wherein the computer processor alters said information strip of said bulk container to indicate that said actual bulk quantity of the medication has been reduced when the medication is dispensed from said bulk medication container.

13. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 1, and wherein the dispensing machine has a plurality of said medication cassettes, each of said cassettes having its own separate information strip, and each of said cassettes holding a quantity of a particular type of the medication, each of said separate information strips having separate actual quantity information and medication type information corresponding to the medication in its said cassette, said sensing mechanism transmitting said separate actual quantity information and medication type information to the computer processor, the computer processor using said separate actual quantity information and medication type information to develop inventory information, said inventory information including a total actual quantity for each particular type of the medication in the dispensing machine.

14. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 13, and wherein there are a plurality of dispensing machines, each of the dispensing machines transmitting its said inventory information to a data base for compiling total inventory information said total inventory information including a grand total actual quantity information for each particular type of the medication in said plurality of dispensing machines.

15. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 1, and wherein said cassette has an interior adapted to hold said actual quantity of the medication in the cassette, and said cassette has a locking mechanism for preventing access to said medication in said interior of said cassette.

16. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 15, and wherein the dispensing machine has a compartment for receiving said cassette and a door for locking said cassette in said compartment.

17. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 1, and wherein said cassette has an interior and partitions dividing said interior into a plurality of individual cells, each of said individual cells being adapted to hold one dose of the medication, said cassette being adapted to allow separate removal of said doses of medication from said cassette.

18. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 17, and wherein said housing has an interior compartment, and said partitions and individual cells are formed by a rotating wheel, said rotating wheel being located in said interior compartment, said rotating wheel allowing said opening to separately align with each of said cells, and said opening of said housing being sized to allow removal of said one dose of the medication from its said individual cell.

19. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 17, and wherein said partitions and individual cells are formed by a blister pack.

20. (Original) The interactive medication cassette of Claim 1, and wherein the dispensing machine is automated and the computer processor controls said dispensing of the medication by the dispensing machine.

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60. (Currently amended) A medication distribution and information system for distributing a specific medication and coupling corresponding medication information to the specific medication during distribution, said medication distribution and information system comprising the steps of:

providing a dispensing machine having an associated computer processor and a sensing mechanism for obtaining and transmitting information to and from said computer processor, said computer processor controlling said dispensing of medication by said dispensing machine;

providing ~~first~~ a first container holding the specific medication and having a machine readable electronic label containing the corresponding medication information;

providing a second container having a machine readable and writable information strip;

joining said first and second containers with said dispensing machine, and aligning said sensing mechanism with said electronic label and said information strip;

dispensing said specific medication from said first container to said second container, transferring said specific medication information from said electronic label to said information strip and altering said information strip to include said specific medication information;

removing said second container from said dispensing machine for distribution, said second container containing said specific medication and said information strip containing said specific medication information.

61. (Original) The medication distribution and information system of claim 60, and wherein said medication information includes medication type information to facilitate identifying said type of medication in said second container.

62. (Currently amended) The medication distribution and information system of claim 60, and wherein said medication information includes pharmaceutical manufacturer name and batch identification information to facilitate ~~a~~ said recall of said specific medication in said second container.

63. (Original) The medication distribution and information system of claim 60, and further comprising the steps of:

providing a second dispensing machine having a second computer processor and a second sensing mechanism for obtaining and transmitting information to and from said second computer processor, said second computer processor controlling dispensing of medication by said second dispensing machine;

providing a third container having a second machine readable and writable information strip, and said second dispensing machine being adapted to dispense said specific medication from said second container to said third container;

joining said second and third containers with said second dispensing machine, and aligning said information strip and said second information strip with said sensing mechanism;

dispensing said specific medication from said second container to said third container, and transferring said specific medication information from said information strip of said second container to said information strip of said third container;

altering said information strip of said third container to include said specific medication information; and,

removing said third container from said second dispensing machine for further distribution, said third container containing said specific medication and said information strip of said third container containing said specific medication information.

64. (Original) The medication distribution and information system of claim 63, and wherein said dispensing machine dispenses a specific quantity of said specific medication to said second container, said dispensing machine altering said information strip to include said medication quantity information, said second dispensing machine receiving said medication quantity information from said second container to facilitate maintaining an inventory of said specified medication in said second dispensing machine.

65. (Original) The medication distribution and information system of claim 64, and wherein said dispensing machine is a pharmacy dispensing machine and said second dispensing machine is a hospital floor dispensing machine.

66. (Original) A medication distribution and inventory system comprising the steps of:

providing first and second containers, said first container holding a specific quantity of medication and having a machine readable electronic label containing medication information corresponding to the medication and including specific quantity information, said second container having a machine readable and writable information strip;

providing first and second dispensing machines, said first dispensing machine being adapted to dispense the medication from said first container to said second container and transmit said medication information from said electronic label to said information strip, and said first and second dispensing machines being in communication with a common data base;

joining said first and second containers with said first dispensing machine;

dispensing a desired quantity of the medication from said first container to said second container;

altering said information strip to include said medication information including desired quantity information corresponding to said desired quantity of the medication;

transmitting said desired quantity information to said data base, and updating said data base to indicate a reduction of the medication in said first container and an increase of the medication in said second container by said desired quantity of the medication;

removing said second container from said first dispensing machine and transporting it to said second dispensing machine;

joining said second container with said second dispensing machine; and,

updating said data base to indicate an increase of the medication in said second dispensing machine by said desired quantity of medication; and,

using said data base to maintain an inventory of said medication in said first and second containers and second dispensing machine.